

A CROSS - CULTURAL STUDY
of
The Netherlands



by

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PREFACE

It is not possible to write one paper which definitively states situations, attitudes, customs, or social behaviors which apply to the entire country of The Netherlands. One may find that a variety of attitudes and expectations exists, and that the appropriate social behavior in a situation would vary from city to city. The focus of this paper is The Hague; however, in some instances Rotterdam and Amsterdam are mentioned. Generally speaking, the situation and social behaviors described in this paper are those found or expected in The Hague. The Hague is generally more conservative (in behaviors and expectations, not necessarily politically), formal, and holds with tradition more than some other cities. Social behaviors stated here would be correct in The Hague, Rotterdam and Amsterdam, though perhaps more formal than the situations would demand in the latter cities.



Mauritshuis Museum and the Parliament Building, The Hague

INTRODUCTION

(THE NETHERLANDS – SIMILAR YET DIFFERENT)

American visitors to The Netherlands are almost always impressed with the friendliness of the Dutch people. They often say that they have appreciated the warm hospitality, the friendly and helpful people, and being able to speak English everywhere. It has felt “so much like home.”

There are indeed many similarities between The Netherlands and the United States. Day-to-day activities are not very different, and certainly not difficult. Procedures for shopping, taking public transportation, and leisure-time activities are much the same as those in other European countries, and similar to those in the United States.

Someone who lives in The Netherlands for a period of time, and who takes the time, interest and effort to ask questions and observe the way of life finds, however, that some of these similarities are superficial. To assume that everything in The Netherlands is the same as things you are familiar with, and therefore to not look more deeply into the culture, people and way life in order to find differences can limit your experience. Many activities and social organizations are available, but it requires time, effort and persistence to make or maintain contacts with Dutch people rather than with other foreign residents in The Netherlands. When you find that there are differences that can be confusing and unexpected, don't let them upset you, but remember that you are in a foreign country, and try to understand the reasons for the differences.

Americans may perceive the surface friendliness and helpfulness toward visitors as an indication of friendship, and assume that Dutch people have many friends. On the contrary, Dutch friendships develop slowly. Friendships among Dutch people tend to develop with those they meet in school, or those who have similar political or religious beliefs. They are more deeply-rooted, firmly-based and longer-lasting than many friendships which Americans normally establish. Thus the Dutch have few “vrienden” (friends), but many “kennissen” (acquaintances), making a true friendship a cherished one.

Some signs that a friendship is developing are invitations to celebrate a birthday or a Sinterklaas (St. Nicholas) party with a Dutch family. You might not be invited to celebrate these occasions, or to a Dutch home for anything but an official function in a two-year stay in The Netherlands. You must often know someone

for longer than two years before a friendship begins. Expectations regarding reciprocity are also somewhat different in The Netherlands from those in the United States. Attendance of Dutch personnel at official functions is considered to be in the course of duty, and they are not required or expected to reciprocate. However, on a personal level, if a Dutch person invites an American for coffee (in the morning or after dinner), he/she expects the American to reciprocate. The opposite is not true. If an American invites a Dutch person to come for coffee or dinner, the Dutch person will not expect to reciprocate. It may be frustrating for Americans to receive no reciprocal invitations during a two-year stay, and can be a source of hard feelings or misunderstandings.

The new person in the neighborhood is expected to indicate that he is willing and ready to establish contact with the neighbors. You must take the first step and invite the neighbors to come for coffee, rather than waiting for the them to introduce themselves to you. As the new person, you must also encourage the friendship to develop if you want it to, as the Dutch will remain reserved, not waiting to impose himself on anyone else. This should not be interpreted as unfriendliness or coolness. Some patience is called for in developing friendships, and it is you who must take the initiative.



A typical Dutch city center.

Several factors have affected the development of the Dutch culture and approach to life. Among these are population density (almost 14 million people in an area smaller than the state of South Carolina), the small size of the country, history, religion and geographic location of the country.



Population density and the size of the country have made rules of etiquette and a certain amount of regulation necessary. The Dutch people feel an individual's privacy, both personal and spatial, should be respected at all cost. Rules of etiquette, politeness to others, and regulations are designed to ensure privacy and the sanctity of the individual. Some of these rules and regulations may be perceived by Americans as being excessively restrictive and confining. The Dutch value a smoothly running, organized social system, and they realize that in order to achieve that, it might mean that an individual must sacrifice a personal desire or preference in favor of group considerations.

Open space is highly valued. It is important for each family to have a small plot of land, a garden of its own. Studies have shown that psychological problems develop when Dutch families live in large high-rise apartment complexes. Smaller homes in lower buildings with areas of garden space are being built instead, though it means that fewer people can be housed in a limited area. It is possible for city-dwellers to rent a garden plot with a small garden house in areas set aside for them. Parks, forests, dunes and recreation areas are popular places to spend leisure time. The open space is appreciated, as well as the opportunity to be away from the crowds, and to enjoy nature.

In general, everything is on a smaller scale in The Netherlands when compared to the United States. The size of the houses, apartments, appliances, cars, roads, yards, gardens, closets, to mention a few examples, are much smaller. Diminutives are noticeably used in the language. The suffix “-je” is added to many nouns to make a diminutive. This is usually done in an affectionate way, but can also be done in the pejora-

tive sense. A book (“boek”) becomes “boekje”, a Pils (a beer) becomes a “Pilsje” and house (“huis”) becomes “huisje”.



History and religion have influenced the religious, racial and ethnic tolerance that the Dutch people are known for. The tolerance does not necessarily indicate respect for or acceptance of other beliefs or opinions. A Dutch person believes that his way of doing something or his opinion is the only “right” way. He may tell you that your way is “wrong” or that you shouldn’t do something if you are doing something he doesn’t agree with. Respect for others’ beliefs or opinions is reflected to a degree in language usage. Opinions are stated, for example, “Ik vind het leuk/mooi/niet zo mooi” (I find it nice/beautiful/not so beautiful) rather than saying “it is nice” or “it is not beautiful”. Opinions are not generally open to discussion or debate. By law, there are protections for a person’s racial or national background and religious beliefs in that it is unlawful to make derogatory remarks regarding these. In any case, it is in poor taste to make such remarks.

Calvinist influence can be seen in the approach to life. Thrift, moderation, lack of ostentation are highly valued. Thrift (or at least giving the impression of thrift), and moderation in dress, entertaining, and every aspect of life may be difficult for Americans to maintain if they are used to doing things on a large scale. Some of the things Americans might not consider to be ostentatious, such as serving or taking large portions of food or drinks, talking and laughing loudly at parties, talking about or showing off new appliances or other purchases, might be considered ostentatious by a Dutch person. This does not mean that an American living in The Netherlands should not be himself or express himself, but that moderation should be a consideration in situations with Dutch people.

SOCIAL CUSTOMS

A smoothly running, well-ordered society is important to the Dutch people, and rules are considered necessary to achieve that order. Good manners and basic consideration for other people are necessities, too, in a country so small and as densely populated as The Netherlands. Rigid rules of etiquette are followed. The Dutch are more formal in most situations than Americans may be used to. This is evident in dress, social situations and all relations with other people. The Dutch are reserved, but friendly and hospitable behind this reserve. Their formality and reserve should not be interpreted as coolness or unfriendliness. If there is any question regarding the way to handle a social situation, it is best to err on the side of conservatism or formality. The Dutch people don’t like unexpected things to happen. Social customs and etiquette rules help to ensure against that occurrence.



Dutch Coat of Arms

You don’t need to worry too much about making a social faux-pas, for it would probably be dismissed as being “foreign” custom, but some guidelines may be helpful in avoiding embarrassing situations. You can generally learn what is expected or appropriate by observing others around you, asking someone, or waiting for the Dutch person to take the lead.

GREETINGS

It is almost always appropriate to shake hands when greeting someone in The Netherlands. It is customary to look the person in the eye while shaking hands and saying “goede morgen” (good morning), “goede middag” (good afternoon), or “goede avond” (good evening). Colleagues or neighbors do not shake hands each time they meet. The spoken greeting only is used. It is also used when entering a shop, waiting room, ele-

vator or train compartment. The greeting is sometimes shortened to “dag” (literally, day) in less formal situations. “Dag” is often used when saying goodbye in the above situations.

When you join a group of people, it is customary to greet and shake hands with everyone in the group. If you don't know someone in the group, introduce yourself by saying your last name as you shake hands. Men and women often rise for these greetings. You should say good-bye and shake hands with everyone present when you leave a group. If it is a very large party or reception, you may make an exception and say good-bye only to the host, hostess and guest of honor, as appropriate.

Good friends often greet each other at home by shaking hands and then drawing together, still holding hands, and kissing (touching cheeks), first left cheeks together, then right. This is a less formal way of greeting, and indicates friendship. Men do not usually greet other men this way. Offer your hand in any case, but wait to see if the Dutch person draws you forward. This will not be the greeting used until you have known the person for some time, and may never be the greeting used.

It is polite when beginning a conversation, approaching someone to ask a question, and when entering a shop, to say “goede morgen/goede middag/goede avond” (good morning/day/evening) as appropriate, and say the person's last name if you know it, such as “goede middag, Mevrouw (Mrs.) Jansen.” “Goede middag, Mevrouw” or “Goede middag, Meneer” (Mr.) would also be correct, but never say “Goede middag, Jansen”, omitting the “Mevrouw” or “Meneer”.



The Erasmus Bridge in Rotterdam

When introducing people, it is appropriate to say “Mevrouw” or “Meneer” and the last name. First names are seldom used, and you should wait for the Dutch person to give permission to use his or her first name.

The polite form “U” (you) is used when speaking with strangers, casual acquaintances and older people. The familiar form “je” or “jij” (you, singular) or “jullie” (you, plural) is used with relatives, close friends, children, or anyone whom you call by first name. The polite form should be used until the Dutch person uses the familiar form with you. This is the case whether talking to work colleagues, household help, or strangers. American informality can be perceived as being overly familiar with someone, and should be avoided in work and social situations.

When you leave a person or group, and expect to see them again in the near future, you can say “tot ziens” (see you again, be seeing you), or if you will see the person again in just a few minutes, you can say “tot straks” (literally, until presently). Women friends may send greetings to each others' families when saying good-bye. They may say “Goeten aan de familie” (Greetings to the family). This is only said when the family members have not been present, and are acquainted with the friend giving the greeting.

It is customary to answer the telephone by saying your last name. It is expected that a caller will identify himself or herself immediately, and then begin the conversation. It is considered impolite not to state your name immediately.

MAKING FRIENDS

The newcomer in a neighborhood must take the first step and indicate that he or she wants to make the acquaintance of the neighbors. The custom of leaving a calling card in the neighbors' mailboxes is not done much now, but may be appreciated by older neighbors. You may want to invite the women in the neighborhood to come for morning coffee at 10:00 – 11:00, tea at 3:00 or 4:00 pm, or husbands and wives for coffee at a specified time in the evening, usually 8:00, 8:30 or 9:00 pm. You might want to keep in mind that particularly in cities, neighbors are not very friendly to each other. People like their privacy, but it is a good idea to invite your neighbors over to get acquainted shortly after your arrival.

Regarding invitations and making plans, the Dutch people may take what you say literally. If you say you will telephone or invite someone to your home for coffee, they will expect you to do so unless it is a very vague statement of time. If you say "sometime", it is vague enough, but if you say "next week" or "next Tuesday", a Dutch person will expect you to follow through. This would be considered a kind of promise, and a promise is a binding. Promises are not often made. The future tense is not used to express "I will", but the present tense is used instead. To say "Ik zal morgen komen" (I will come tomorrow) is considered a promise, whereas "Ik kom wel eens langs" (I'll come along) is a statement, but not as binding.

A GUEST IN A DUTCH HOME



An invitation into a Dutch home is not given impulsively, on the spur-of-the-moment, or without careful thought and planning. It is a special occasion. The home is very important to the Dutch people. Visitors are generally invited into a Dutch home only on special occasions, and are not expected to "make themselves at home" as we might do in the United States. Don't, for instance, go to a shelf and pick up items or figurines that interest you, but ask if you may look at them. Be aware that the hostess has taken a great deal of time and care for special preparations so that your visit will be enjoyable. It may seem to you that every detail for a party is planned and timed almost to the point of seeming orchestrated, but this is to ensure that the guests will have an enjoyable evening, and to limit the possibility of unexpected events taking place.

Guests are treated royally, with all attention given to the guests' pleasure. There are certain foods and drinks considered appropriate for certain times of day, and are only offered at these times. The host or hostess may even have considered your preference for cigarettes, and offer these. They may also offer you coffee. This is the way the Dutch people show hospitality, and it is not considered acceptable to deviate from these customs. If you can relax and let things go as planned, with no hurry, you may almost feel spoiled by the attention given to you as a guest.

An invitation may be written or given by telephone. It is usually announced well in advance (three to four weeks for official functions) of the date of the party. The time of the party will usually be specified. If it is not, ask the hostess, for times of coffee, as the hostess' preference or schedule may vary. You are expected to be punctual, not early OR late. Invitations are not usually given for weekends or public holidays, since this is time usually reserved for the family. A printed invitation includes the wife's maiden name, and women often sign their names with the maiden name hyphenated after the married name, for example, "Mevrouw van Dijk – de Jong".

Always take flowers or chocolates with you for the hostess. A small original gift would also be appropriate. These are considered thanks for the invitation and the nice evening you're sure to have. For a large dinner party, you can have flowers delivered ahead of time so the hostess doesn't have to take time to put them in

vases when she is busy with the dinner and greeting guests. You may also have the flowers delivered the day following the party, but it is preferable to arrange for delivery before the party. The flowers will be put in vases and brought into the room where the guests are. When you are invited for coffee or a “borrel” (evening drink), you should take flowers the first time you go to a home if not every time after that. It is not necessary to take flowers to a large cocktail party. A thank-you note or phone call the next day will be appreciated after any party.

Dress is more formal than in the United States. Men wear suits and women wear street-length dresses or skirts, blouses and blazers for parties. Men should not remove their jackets at a party or dinner unless invited to do so or if the host removes his, both of which are very unlikely. A party is an occasion for dressing up. Women don't usually wear their daytime clothes.



DINNER AND EVENING PARTIES: If you are invited for dinner, the host and hostess will greet you at the door, shake hands with you, then invite you to the living room. You will then greet other people present or introduce yourself and the hostess will indicate where you are to sit. Seating is carefully planned with the comfort and pleasure of the guests in mind before the guests arrive. Wait for the hostess to ask you to sit and to tell you where she would like you to sit. Drinks will be offered, and when everyone is served, the host, hostess and all guests raise their glasses, exchange glances and say “Cheers” or “Proost”. Glasses are often raised again and glances exchanged a second time, but no “Cheers” is said. The host may make a toast, and the exchange of glances and “Cheers” are repeated. Do not take a sip of your drink until this has been done. There may not be much (if any) ice for the drinks. Refrigerators and freezing compartments are small, and the Dutch people don't usually drink cocktails with ice, as Americans know them. You may be offered a “whisky” (Scotch), a “jonge” (young) or “oude” (old) Genever (the Dutch gin, which is served ice cold in small glasses, and is sipped), as well as other drinks such as beer, medium or dry sherry, wine, gin and tonic, or juice. A second drink may be offered before dinner. Do not bring an unfinished drink to the dinner table.

Hors d'oeuvres may be placed on the table, but do not help yourself to them, or to seconds. The hostess will pass them to you. A small dish for each person may be passed to you. Take a small portion from the larger dish to your individual dish when the hostess passes it. It is generally advisable to take a small portion whenever food is offered to you. The hostess may have prepared one portion for each person, and have each one carefully arranged on a tray.

The hostess will invite guests to come to the dinner table, and tell them where she would like to have them sit. You may sit down when the hostess asks you to be seated. Three courses are usually served for dinner, with wine or beer as the usual beverage. The host may make a toast, and everyone raises glasses and exchanges glances before the first sip is taken. Toasts may continue throughout the dinner, so you may want to keep some wine in your glass. Do not begin eating before the hostess begins. Coffee is served after dessert. Your hostess may put milk and sugar in your coffee for you, so tell her if you prefer black coffee or no sugar. A drink or liqueur may be offered after coffee and dessert, and peanuts or small crackers (“zoutjes”) or wine and cheese may also be served. This usually signals the end of the evening, and guests take their leave after the drinks are finished. During the course of the evening, you may offer to help the hostess, but don't expect her to accept your offer.

An evening invitation for drinks will often be for 8:00, 8:30 or 9:00 pm. It is customary to begin the evening with coffee and sometimes a pastry from the bakery. Drinks will then be offered, with salty snacks (“zoutjes”), and perhaps small sandwiches or other food later. People may arrive up to an hour after the stated time of a cocktail party, but you should be punctual for a smaller party or a personal invitation.

DAYTIME PARTIES: A morning coffee or afternoon tea invitation usually involves having coffee or tea and a pastry, and time for conversation. It is important to be punctual, because it may be that guests will not be served until everyone has arrived. The hostess will have taken time and effort to prepare for you even if you are the only guest. Dropping in for a quick coffee, as known in the United States, is not done in The Netherlands. If you want to call on someone, telephone ahead of time to set a time.

Coffee will be served shortly after your arrival. The hostess may have several different types of pastry, and often asks the guest to choose the one they want first. A glass of sherry may be offered after coffee. Do not help yourself to a pastry before it is offered, or to more coffee or tea. The hostess will offer it.



Time is taken for parties or coffee or dinner. They are not hurried. It is better to refuse an invitation if you must go someplace else or get home immediately than to accept and cut the visit short.

AS A HOSTESS

When you entertain in your home you are not expected to entertain in exactly the same way that the Dutch people do, but your guests will be more comfortable if you observe the basic customs and rules of etiquette that they are used to.

Be sure to have several vases of different sizes on hand so you can put the flowers brought by guests in water and bring them into the room where the guests are sitting. It is customary to offer foods and beverages appropriate to the time of day soon after a guest arrives. Coffee is appropriate all day, sherry after 11:00 am, tea in the afternoon. When offering drinks to guests it is a good idea to offer dry and medium sherry, beer, wine and juice. Gin and tonic and whisky (Scotch) with soda water are popular drinks in the evening. You should also have Genever (the Dutch gin) well-chilled in the freezer, and Genever glasses on hand for serving it. Pass the hors d'oeuvres, cookies or pastry to your guests, as they will not help themselves. Cheese is not eaten as a dessert in The Netherlands, but only for breakfast, lunch or a snack.

Dutch guests are used to having “koffiemelk” (literally, coffee milk) in their coffee. This can be purchased at grocery stores, or evaporated milk is a good substitute. The milk and sugar should be put in a creamer and sugar set, not poured or offered from the containers.

Do not expect guests to take off coats, take a seat, or serve themselves food unless you specifically ask them to do so. A guest may ask you where you would like him or her to sit if you do not indicate this. Everyone will wait to begin drinking until glasses are raised together and “Cheers” is said, or until you begin drinking your coffee if you are the hostess.



SPECIAL OCCASIONS AND HOLIDAYS

BIRTHDAYS (“VERJAARDAGEN”) are very important in The Netherlands. Relatives and friends are expected to visit, so the person having the birthday is expected to be at home all day (in the evening, on a weekday) to receive guests. All family members are congratulated on the occasion of the birthday. A handshake and saying “Gefeliciteerd” (Congratulations) to each family member is appropriate. If you are invited to celebrate a birthday, you are expected to remember that person’s birthday in the future. You might keep your own birthday calendar, as the Dutch do. The Dutch people will not forget your birthday, either. The birthday calendar hanging in every Dutch family’s bathroom is a reminder for birthdays of relatives and good friends. It is customary for the person celebrating to provide pastries for colleagues at work, and for the child celebrating to bring sweets or cheese to all his classmates. Fruits or cheese have been encouraged recently rather than sweets.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES (“TROUWDAGEN”) are usually celebrated by family and relatives. The anniversaries of 12.5 years (copper anniversary, halfway to the silver anniversary), 25 years (silver) and 50 years (gold) are special. The couple celebrating often give a party for many people.

ENGAGEMENTS (“VERLOVINGEN”) are announced by two calling cards sent in the same envelope. These are sent to family, friends and acquaintances. There may be a reception, and you may send a gift for the future home, or flowers if you attend. There may be a list of gifts the couple would like to receive. You can ask the mother of the bride-to-be if there is a list, and select a gift.



Wedding of Crown Prince Willem Alexander and Maxima Zorreguieta, February 2002

WEDDINGS (“HUWELIJKEN”) are announced in the newspapers, and by cards sent to relatives, friends and acquaintances. The announcement is a large folded card with a formal announcement by the bride’s parents on one side and by the groom’s parents on the other. This is an announcement, not an invitation, and is handled differently than in the states. You may attend any or all ceremonies listed on the announcement, but this is up to you. A civil ceremony at the “Gemeente” (City Hall) is mandatory to meet legal requirements. This may be followed by a church ceremony and a reception follows. The times for these are stated on the announcement. The church ceremony may or may not take place on the same day as the civil ceremony. You may attend either ceremonies or the reception but you are not obligated to attend all three. It is necessary to send a gift **ONLY** if you attend the reception. Your gift can be sent to the bride’s home before the wedding (this is preferred) or brought with you to the reception. It is customary to ask the bride’s mother if the bride has a list of wedding gifts she would like. This list may be registered at several stores. You may go there and select your gift from the items remaining on the list. The store will deliver the gifts to the bride one week before the wedding. If you don’t know the bride well, you may have flowers sent, preferably one week before the wedding so she has a chance to enjoy them. You can expect a thank you note for your gift, but perhaps not immediately.

You may receive an invitation to dinner after the reception. A reply to the announcement is not necessary unless you are invited to the dinner. You may see “R.S.V. P.” or “v.g.a.” (“verzoeken gaarne antwoord”) on the invitation or announcement, which indicates that your reply would be appreciated. Formal wear is the appropriate dress code and the dinner may be black-tie.

The gifts received at the time of the wedding (and perhaps the engagement) are the only gifts a couple receives. Bridal showers are not customary.

BIRTHS (“GEBOORTEN”) are announced by card sent to friends and relatives and also in the newspaper. Baby showers are not customary. A gift may be sent to the mother. A certain food “beschuit met muisjes” (an rusk with pink and white anise-flavored candies on top), has become associated with birth celebrations.

DEATHS (“OVERLIJDENS”) are announced in the obituaries along with information about the funeral and a time where condolences may be expressed to the family. The words “geen bezoek” (no visitors) or “geen bloemen” (no flowers) may be in the announcement and these wishes should be respected. A handwritten note expressing condolences is appropriate. There may be a register book that you sign when you attend the funeral. You can expect a note of thanks for your presence and interest several weeks after the funeral.

HOLIDAYS: a highlight of the year is “sinterklaas”, the festival of St. Nicholas. It is celebrated on December 5th. Traditionally, sinterklaas arrives with his Moorish attendant, “Zwarte Piet” (Black Peter) fourteen days before Sinterklaas is celebrated. Children and adults alike greet them as they ride through the towns and villages. Sinterklaas keeps a book of children’s behaviors and the “good” children receive a gift during these 14 days. The gifts are found in shoes placed by the fireplace or door.

Larger gifts are exchanged on December 5th. Each gift is accompanied by an anonymous poem written specifically for the recipient of the gift and is often hidden within another object. The poem can be a clue to the gift giver and may emphasize qualities or personal traits of the recipient. Special care and time are spent writing the personal poems and wrapping or hiding the gift. Restaurants are usually closed on the night of December 5th and invitation should not be given for that evening or the evening before since everyone is busy preparing the gifts and poems.



CHRISTMAS is celebrated more quietly than Sinterklaas. It is a religious holiday, a family affair. Christmas trees are decorated but gifts are not often exchanged. December 26th is the “second Christmas day” and is also celebrated at home.

NEW YEAR’S EVE, called “OUDEJAARSAVOND” (old year’s eve), is celebrated at home with fireworks display presented in many areas at midnight. Most restaurants are closed. It is customary to tip those people who serve you regularly at New Year’s. They may leave cards wishing you a happy new year in your door. A tip of 5 euros is appropriate.

The **EVE OF LIBERATION DAY**, called “NATIONALE HERDENKINGSDAG” (National Remembrance Day) is celebrated on May 4th. Flags fly at half mast from 6:00 – 8:15 p.m. At 8:00 p.m., two minutes of silence are observed and activity stops to commemorate those who lost their lives during World War II. Dinners and cocktail parties should not be planned for this day. Liberation Day (“Bevrijdingsdag”) is celebrated on May 5th and is a time for rejoicing. Sports activities and competitions are planned and there are parades in some cities.



An enthusiastic Dutch fan.



The **QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY** is a national holiday. Orange banners or streamers fly from buildings. The national flag is flown and orange flags are placed on trams and buses. Flowers and gifts are given to the Queen's at the palace by people who have traveled from their towns and villages to do so. The day of celebration is not always the exact date of the Queen's birthday but is determined by the Queen. Beatrix, when she was crowned, announced that April 30 (the date of Juliana's birthday) would continue to be the day for the Queen's birthday celebration.

HRH Queen Beatrix The third Tuesday in September is "**PRINSJESDAG**," the state opening of the parliament. The Queen rides through The Hague in the golden coach to the Binnenhof, the seat of parliament. People may stand inside the Binnenhof by invitation only. A limited number of tickets are available through the Embassy Personnel Section. If you attend the ceremony at the Binnenhof, you must arrive at a specified time before the arrival of the Queen and you are asked to stay until she leaves. The Queen rides around the courtyard in her magnificent coach, waves to the crowd, steps down from the coach and enters the parliament to give a speech which can be heard through loudspeakers in the courtyard. The opportunity to view this ceremony should not be passed up.

GIFT GIVING



Flowers or chocolates are appropriate gifts when you are invited to a home for dinner or coffee. It is not necessary to take flowers for a large cocktail party. ALWAYS take flowers when you are going to someone's home for the first time. A small original gift, such as notepaper, and sweets other than chocolates would be appropriate. For special occasions such as birthdays, a modest gift is appropriate. Lavish or extravagant gifts are not considered in good taste and would embarrass the recipient. They may feel obliged to reciprocate the kindness. Care is taken in the selection of gifts and thought is given to the person who will receive the gift. This care and thought is appreciated more than a lavish gift would.

Gifts you receive should be opened immediately when the giver is present. A thank you note is not expected but a phone call to say thanks is appreciated. Gifts that would be considered inappropriate are expensive, extravagant or ostentatious gifts.

CHILDREN

Children in The Netherlands are taught to shake hands and look directly in the eyes of the person they are meeting or greeting. Your children are expected to do the same. When a Dutch child comes home to a guest, they are expected to wash up, shake hands with the guest and then leave the room. They are not to eat food that is meant for the guest.

Younger Dutch children may call the mother of a friend or his mother's friends "Tante" (aunt) also using her first name, such as "Tante Janneke." Children are expected to give up their seat on a tram, bus or train to an elderly person. Criticism or correction of the behavior of someone else's child is not well received.

DAY TO DAY LIVING SHOPPING

Shopping in The Netherlands is not difficult, however prices are high. It may take some patience on your part to learn your clothing size, meat and produce weight equivalents, etc. but you do not need to hesitate to ask for help. There are department stores, shopping malls and supermarkets with goods under one roof as well as many other small neighborhood shops, open markets, and shopping streets. You may go to the

“Groenteboer” (greengrocer) for produce, the “Vishandel” (fish shop), “kruidenier” (grocery store), “Slagerij” (butcher shop), “raasboer” (cheese shop) and the “Bakkerij” (bakery) for your day-to-day shopping. Be sure to bring your own shopping bag, many food stores do not provide you with bags for your purchases. It can also be advantageous to become acquainted with your local shopkeepers. They may be willing to deliver you items when you are ill or give you special services if you are familiar with them and a regular customer.

Clearance sales are held in January and June – July each year. Sale prices are indicated by the words “uitverkoop”, “afgeprijsd”, “reclame” and “opruiming”/ shops are usually open from 9 – 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 – 6:00 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. They are closed on Sundays, holidays and Monday mornings until 10:00 – 11:00 a.m. there may be a “koopavond” or a late-shopping night one night a week. It may be difficult at first to learn to think ahead and buy items needed for a long holiday weekend. The Christmas and Easter holidays (two days each are celebrated so stores will be closed then) may be particularly difficult. You may need to change some ideas of “needs” and learn to do without things you forgot to buy on Friday or Saturday. A mobile shop “S.R.V.” may come to the neighborhood several days per week so you can fill in some items.



Albert Heijn, a favorite local grocery store.

The shops are usually crowded since there are so many people doing their shopping every day or so. Saturday is a particularly busy day. Be patient. The word “Pardon!” (sorry/excuse me) may well become a familiar part of your vocabulary during this time.

A tax called “statiegeld” is charged for bottles, whether beer, milk, or juices. This amount is refunded when you return the bottles. It is a good idea to keep track of this and return the bottles since the amount for a weeks grocery can amount to something significant.

A value-added tax, BTW (“belasting over de Toegevoegde Waarde”) of 10% is included in the price quoted for an item in shops and restaurants. This may be refundable on some goods in some circumstances. Keep your sales receipts when you inquire at the Embassy about the refund.

If you want to ask a salesperson about an item, you may, but realize that it is customary for the salesperson to finish helping one customer at a time. The salespeople try to keep track of the order, but on a busy day they may just simply ask “Wie is aan de beurt?” (Who is next?) or “Wie kan ik helpen?” (Who may I help?). Don’t hesitate to say “Ja” (Yes) to indicate that it is your turn.

When you shop for clothing, it is a good idea to try them on first as sizes may vary. Dressing rooms (“paskamers”) are usually available. Keep all sales receipts since good can not be returned without them.



There are a number of open markets and shopping streets where merchants display goods in stalls that are usually put up early in the morning and dismantled at night. Generally speaking, it is not acceptable to handle the merchandise. If you are interested in an item, and want to know the price, greet the person whose stall it is and ask for the price (“Hoeveel kost dit?” or “Wat kost dit?”). You may ask to pick up the item (“May ik dit bekijken?” – May I look at this?) but don’t just pick it up. At a produce stall most things will be priced on signs. The prices may be for one kilo. A kilo is 1000 grams or ap-

proximately 2.5 U.S. pounds. Prices may also be quoted for a half kilo. You may also see prices given as “per 100 gram”, “per ons” (per 100 grams), or “per stuk” (per piece). Sometimes you may be given a sample of the product you are planning to buy. You may also ask for this.

Ordinary caution and attention should be taken, but generally you do not need to be concerned about being charged unfairly. There are several methods for payment: cash, charge accounts at some stores, and traveler’s checks in euros. Personal checks are generally not accepted. Bargaining is usually not practiced and credit purchases are not usually made.

A verbal contract, such as a clear statement of intent or a handshake is binding in Holland. Be sure that it is clear to you and the salesperson of you want to take time to think about a purchase.

TRANSPORTATION



An extensive highway system and good public transportation systems make traveling in Holland very simple. Road maps and city maps showing bus, tram and train routes are readily available and invaluable. A lot of the information about transportation is written in English. It is not difficult to find someone who will help you and explain the procedure.

DRIVING CUSTOMS: an important difference between driving in the States and driving in Holland is that the cars coming from the right have the right of way except when priority is marked. This can take some getting used to. Sometimes it may seem that there is just an alley on your right when you are on the main road but do not be fooled by the narrow streets. Trams usually have right of way to cars. Also be wary of bikes as they have the right of way when they are going straight if

you are trying to turn right.

Spot checks for driving under the influence, car registration papers and car safety are made. Drivers can be fined if they are not wearing a seat belt. The law against driving while intoxicated is strictly enforced and penalties are stiff.

Auto repairs can be made only at a garage. Gas stations are usually not equipped to make repairs. Some stations are self-service (“zelf-bediening”) while others have attendants who fill the tank and wash your windows. Some auto accessories are available at gas stations. Gas coupons are available from the Embassy and the Consulate General personnel through the Embassy Administrative section.

In case of minor accidents, it is customary to exchange names or business cards. If you do some damage when the driver is not present, it would be polite to leave you business card on the windshield. Payment for car damage is expected to be made within 48 hours of the accident. Traffic jams are not unusual at any time of day. Announcements are made on Dutch radio stations regarding the traffic flow.



Daily traffic jam between The Hague and Utrecht, near Gouda

Maps, auto accessories and information can be obtained through two auto clubs. ANWB and KNAC. ANWB also have a “wegenwacht” (road watch) system and yellow telephones are placed on the side of high-

ways for drivers to call for assistance. There is a fee for membership at these clubs.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION: trains provide punctual frequent service to many cities in Holland and all of Europe. Boat trains go to the Hook of Holland and Vlissingen for connection with ferries to the UK. Information regarding train schedules, ticket prices and tours are available at the Central station or main train stations. A schedule book (“spoorboekje”) can be purchased at stations and some bookshops. A special pass, the Benelux Tourrail, can be purchased and permits the traveler eight days of unlimited travel in Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg within a 15-day time period. The youth fare for this pass is valid for people up to age 26. Take a passport or ID with you when you buy the youth ticket. The Nederlandse Spoorwegen offers special day-to-day tours at reduced prices. The booklet describing these tours is available at train stations. It is in Dutch and is entitled “NS Dagtourisme”.



Tours are also offered through railways that include transportation by rail and hotel with breakfast. Prices are very reasonable. These tours are available to major cities in continental Europe.

Tram and bus tickets for a single ride can be purchased from the driver. You must board at the front door. This is more expensive than purchasing a multiple-ride ticket called “National Strippen Kaart”. These tickets can be used anywhere in Holland on trams, buses and the metro systems. Spot checks are made frequently and you can be fined if you do not have the appropriate stamp on your strippenkaart. Many trams have buttons both inside and outside of the door that you need to push in order for the door to open.

Rotterdam and Amsterdam have an underground metro system. The ticket procedure is the same as any train or bus. If you do not have enough change, you will have to put in more than necessary but keep in mind that you will not receive any change.

Taxis do not cruise around like in the States but can be found at taxi stands (“Taxi Standplaats”) or ordered by phone. Fares are fixed and are shown on the meter.



BICYCLES: Bicycles are plentiful in The Netherlands and cycling is a good way to see the countryside. There are, however, a number of things a cyclist should be aware of particularly in the cities. Bicycle paths, or ‘fietspaden’, usually parallel the roads and are to be used by cyclists and motorcyclists. There are often bicycle traffic lights and white signs with red lettering to help direct bicyclists (‘fietsers’). A cyclist going straight through an intersection has right-of-way over cars turning right across the bicycle path. It is important not to forget that the driver may not see you so proceed with caution. Bicycles may not be parked in an area with a sign that reads “Geen rijwielen plaatsen, s.v.p.” (Do not lean bicycles here, if you please). Bicycles can be taken onto trains and can be rented at many train stations. There are also tours offered by the Nederlandse Spoorwegen (rail service), which include a trip by train, bike rental upon arrival and maps for bike tours.

PEDESTRIANS: There are regulations that apply to pedestrians and are helpful to know. Pedestrians have priority when crossing at a zebra crossing but people usually wait until there is a group of pedestrians or a break in the traffic. Jaywalking and walking against the walk-light are not permitted. Violations of these

rules may result in a warning or fine by police officers. Remember to be wary of bicyclists when crossing the road.

There are footpaths (“voetpaden”) in parks or country areas for pedestrians (“voetgangers”) only. It is possible to walk along the dunes or in specified areas but a “wandelkaart” or walking ticket is required. Information can be obtained at the VVV tourist office.

BARBER/BEAUTY SHOP

Barbershops (“herenkapsalons”) and beauty parlors (“dameskapsalon”) are located in most neighborhoods and in hotels. Hairdressers for both men and women are called “kappers”. It is preferred that an appointment “afspraak”) be made before time, but it is possible to get a haircut on a walk-in basis. It is a good idea to make an appointment if you want a particular hairdresser to do your hair. A service charge is included in the bill (the tip is “inclusief”) so tipping is not necessary. A small tip for a special service is appropriate. Do not tip the owner of the barber or beauty shop.

Greet the hairdresser or receptionist when you enter. You will be directed to a chair or perhaps told there will be a short wait. Coffee or occasionally sherry will be offered.

THEATRE AND CONCERT HALLS

The Netherlands is well known for its cultural events and performances by the Residentie Orchestra (The Hague), Concertgebouw Orchestra (Amsterdam), Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra (Rotterdam), the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, Netherlands Dance Theatre, National Dance Theatre and many guest artists or groups. Theatre and concert tickets can be purchased and reserved at the theatre or concert hall about a week in advance. Some tickets can be booked through the VVV. There is a chart showing the seating arrangement for various concert halls or theatres, which you may ask to see before making seat selections. You will find a sign above each ticket window displaying which performances they handle where you can pick up the reserved tickets at the designated window.



It is customary to check your coat at the “Garderobe” during the performances. There is usually a set charge paid when you check your coat and tipping is not necessary. There may be a sign that reads “Geen fooien” (no tips) posted in that area. Performances begin punctually and latecomers are not seated until the current act or piece is finished. Programs can be purchased in the lobby before the performance begins. Ushers may show you to your seat or indicate the appropriate section.

Audiences are enthusiastic applauders after a performance and usually a standing ovation is given, even if the performance is not particularly spectacular. The audience may also stamp their feet to show approval and may present artists or conductors with a bouquet to show their enthusiasm. Coffee, beer and soft drinks are served before the performance and during the intermission (“pauze”). There is no particular queue and everyone crowds around the serving area. They will ask who is next and will serve whoever speaks up. Don’t worry: most everyone is served before the bell announcing the end of intermission is sounded.

Recitals and organ concerts are sometimes given in churches. Sometimes there is a charge for the recital or they may ask for donations to the church. Seating is not assigned and if there is an empty seat by you, you

may be asked if the seat is taken (“Is dit vrij?”). Recitals begin on time. Visitors are not permitted to walk around the church when a recital is in progress.

Appropriate dress for the theatres and concerts is conservative dress for women and a suit for men. You may see a variety of dress codes from evening gowns (usually elderly women) to blue jeans (usually students).

Motion pictures are usually shown in the original language with Dutch subtitles. Any English subtitles within a movie will not be shown. The showings are not continuous but at specified times. There are pamphlets at every theatre showing the movies playing and the times. Movies in English with Dutch subtitles have the title followed with “OV” while movies in Dutch are titled with “NL” after it. Tickets are sold at the box office before the show and you may want to reserve tickets for first-run popular films. There are sometimes a range of prices for tickets determined by the location of the seat and the popularity of the film. The films begin promptly with first commercials, then previews and then, of course, the film itself. Candy and popcorn and beverages can be obtained in the lobby before the show begins, and there is usually an intermission part the way through the movie for people to go to the lobby to get more refreshments. It is not customary to tip ushers in movie theaters. Motion pictures theaters (Bioscopen) and the current movies showing are listed in the newspapers and for The Hague only, in the Embassy newsletter “The Windmill”.

RESTAURANTS AND SIDEWALK CAFÉS

The Netherlands has inherited a distinctive cuisine from a former colony, Indonesia. A well-known meal is the Indonesian rijstafel (literally, “rice table”) which consists of a number of meat and chicken dishes served with rice and dishes of condiments such as coconut, peanuts, pickled vegetables, fruits and the very hot sambal sauce. The number of dishes varies with each restaurant, but is always large amount of food. It is served in small dishes or warmers, which fill the table. Help yourself from each dish, placing a portion from the plate on the warmer in the center of the table onto your own plate. Beer or mineral water is the recommended beverage as a complement to the spicy dishes. There is usually a fixed price per person for a rijstafel, but there are also other small dishes that can be ordered.

Typical Dutch cooking is simple and solid, and is served in a straightforward manner. There are a large variety of meats, fish and vegetables available and large restaurants offer a good selection of menu items from which to choose. A “Tourist menu” is offered at some restaurants, which serve a fixed menu of several courses. Many restaurants and cafes offer a daily special menu at lunchtime, a “Dagschotel”.



Cafes, many with tables outside during the summer, serve beverages and snack foods. Some snacks include “broodjes” (sandwiches), “uitsmijter” (roast beef or ham open sandwich with fried eggs), croquettes, “frites” (French fries), soup and pastries. Many cafes open at 9:00 a.m. for coffee. Many are licensed for all alcoholic beverages. There is usually a sign “Vergunning” to indicate that the café has a license. The tables outside of the cafes are reserved for paying customers. Signs saying, “Terras uitsluitend met bediening” (Terrace use exclusively with service) and a waiter or waitress takes your order and serves you.

You will not be hurried or pressed to leave your table whether at a café or restaurant. If you like you may spend an afternoon sipping on one drink and reading a newspaper or watching the people go by. The waiter or waitresses usually come immediately to the table when you arrive, hand you a menu and takes your drink order. You will need to request the bill when you are finished: “De rekening, alstublieft” (The bill please). Your table will then be cleared before you are presented with the bill. If you are in a hurry, ask to pay when your order is brought to you. At a sidewalk café, you will pay the waiter or waitress when your beverage is brought to you. It is not necessary to tip, but it is common practice to round the bill off to the next even amount or to leave the coins as a tip. Someone may come up to you ask if he/she may sit in an empty chair next to you. Neither of you is obligated to begin a conversation, but either of you may. It is polite to say “Goede morgen” or “goede middag” (Good morning or Good Day) before giving your order, and to thank the waiter or waitress as you leave (“Dank u wel”), or “Bedankt”). People in The Netherlands spend time enjoying a meal and conversation, so a dinner may last several hours. The waiters are usually attentive, but don’t hover over the tables, so you will probably need to signal them if you want something. To attract the waiter’s attention, you can raise your hand a bit, nod and catch his eye, or you may say “ober” (waiter) in a soft voice. To attract a waitress’s attention, it is best to raise your hand and catch her eye. The word “Ober” is only used when calling waiter.



Any waiter will speak English if you prefer, but the Dutch enjoy it when foreigners make an effort to try the local language.

A service charge of 15% is included in the bill, as is BTW (the value-added tax). This bill is thus “inclusive”. A statement at the bottom of the menu will indicate if the bill is “inclusive”. And extra tip is in order if you have received special attention or exceptional service. The most usual amount for this is about one-third the amount of the included tip. Do not tip the owner of a restaurant.

In addition to restaurants and cafes, there are stands along the sidewalk or beach where snack food, beverages, “frites” (French fries) and herring can be purchased to eat standing up nearby or as you walk along. It is not considered impolite to eat as you walk along. “Frites” are often served with mayonnaise on top, so the person serving will ask you “met of zonder” (with or without) if you don’t specify when you give your order. The order is often shortened to “frites met, alstublieft” (fries with; please; said with emphasis on the “met), or “frites zonder, alstublieft” (fries without, please; said with emphasis on the “zonder”). It is understood that you are referring to mayonnaise.

USING PUBLIC RESTROOMS

Public restrooms are moderately clean and are not difficult to find. There is usually an attendant sitting in or in front of the restroom. If there is an attendant, the minimum tip is 25 cents. Otherwise there is usually an entrance charge of 50 cents. The restrooms can be differentiated by the male and female symbols. Also, the word “Heren” is for the men’s room and “Dames” is for the ladies room.



TIPPING IN THE NETHERLANDS

A service charge of 15% is added to the bill at restaurants, hotels, bars, the barber and beauty shops. The bill is thus “inclusief.” A tip above the charge is appropriate if you have requested special arrangements or have received exceptional service. An example of an appropriate tip would be an extra of 3 or 4 euros for a meal costing 60 euros. It should not exceed half of the 15% service charge. If you aren’t sure if the bill includes service charge, ask when you receive the bill. You may want to round off the amount of the bill at a

café to the nearest even amount and let the waiter or waitress keep the change.

Taxi fares are fixed and are shown on the meter. Tips are included in the fare but a small tip, such as round up the cost of the bill, is appropriate.

It is customary to tip people you confront regularly such as the milkman, the baker (if he delivers to you home), newspaper boy, and trash collectors. This is done the day after New Years day. These people may leave you a card wishing you a happy new year at your door. An appropriate tip may be 5 euros.

Household-help customarily receive a Christmas bonus and a gift or bonus on their birthday. Length of service should be considered in the gift or amount of bonus. If you see a dish with a few coins in it in the hallway when you attend a dinner party, it is usually for the help who were hired to help with the party. One euro is appropriate and should be left in the dish.

VACATION TIME

The customary holiday time for the Dutch is summer, primarily in July and August. Many people go camping or rent a bungalow for two or three weeks. Some people fly or drive to other countries. Local

The Adriatic coast is a common tourist destination for many Northern Europeans.



shopkeepers may announce their vacation dates by placing a sign in the window. Most large companies or restaurants will not close but for certain holidays. However, it may be difficult to arrange household repairs during this time. Most social organizations and activities stop during the summer.

The days are very long in the summer. The sun rises at around 5:00 a.m. and sets at around 10 or 11 p.m. This leaves plenty of time for activities away from home after working hours but can make it difficult to sleep early. The climate in The Netherlands is generally not very sunny or warm. It is a good idea to be flexible enough to change plans to be able to go outside on a sunny day, as there tend to be few. You can expect crowds and traffic jams as most everyone else has the same thought in mind.

There are many activities designated for tourists in the summer. This is the most logical time to do some sightseeing although it will be very crowded. It is suggested that you plan a vacation in or away from Holland during the winter, spring or autumn months as it will tend to be less crowded and the prices will not be as inflated. Prices are raised for about two weeks around Christmas and Easter. As there are very few sunny days throughout the year, it is a good idea to relieve one's gray weather depression with vacations to sunnier climates.

Churches are not open to visitors on Sunday. Photographs may be prohibited in churches. A moderate amount of money can be left as a donation for maintenance.

HEALTH CARE AND ARRANGEMENTS

The family doctors ("huisarts") are important in a family's health care in The Netherlands. Medical facilities for Embassy personnel and families are available. Details can be obtained at the Embassy. In case of an emergency, it would be wise to locate a family doctor who can arrange for admission to a hospital if necessary. Delays in emergency admission can result if you do not have a family doctor to call. Ask the doctor if he takes house calls. The family doctor is your first contact for any health problems and is responsible for many aspects of a person's health care. They are the ones who refer you to a specialist if it is deemed necessary, calls to admit you to a hospital, and is in charge of pre-natal, childbirth and post-natal



programs. It is customary to see your family doctor for some things that most Americans see a specialist for (such as gynecological exams). You are expected to remain with the same family doctor until you move from that town. He may or may not forward your medical records to a specialist and will not permit you to hand-carry your records.

If you are admitted into the hospital, the chief of the appropriate department will be responsible for your care. You should ask what belongings from your home the patient might have in the hospital.

LANGUAGE

It is well known that a large part of the Dutch community has a working knowledge of the English language as well as many other languages. This has been the case throughout history, as the location of the small country has demanded it. The Dutch consider it not only a necessity for them but also feel that it is simply polite to speak the other person's language. They do not expect a foreigner to speak Dutch since it is not a popular language. It can sometimes be difficult for a foreigner to practice speaking Dutch as the Dutch will realize and attempt to speak English. Be persistent, the Dutch are very surprised to find a foreigner who speaks Dutch and will appreciate the effort a great deal.



Visitors and people who have lived in Holland will talk about how easy it is to get around because the majority speaks English. However, a substantial knowledge of the language is important in understanding the culture and people; it can make the difference between living "among" the Dutch and living "with" them. Lack of understanding of the Dutch language can greatly hinder any attempted confrontation. Many workers or repairmen do not speak English and it is always helpful to be able to recognize common words or phrases.

Television broadcasts, most radio programs, information brochures (except for the common tourist pamphlets) and books are in Dutch. Those who live in more rural areas may need to depend more on their knowledge of Dutch in order to achieve daily chores such as shopping or pumping gas. If a U.S. Government spouse or dependent were to consider working in The Netherlands, knowledge of the Dutch language before arrival at post would almost be a requisite. Dutch people applying for jobs have a working knowledge of two languages (at least). Hiring someone who does not have this cannot easily be justified.

OBTAINING INFORMATION

The VVV (national tourist office) can answer many questions and possibly refer you to another office or firm if they are unable to give you the information you want. The VVV offices are usually located in the central area of cities, often near the main train station.

There is also a "Hulp en Informatie Centrum" (abbreviated HIC; Help and Information Center) in most major cities. In The Hague, the Gemeentelijk Informatie Centrum (Municipal Information Center), located in the Groenmarkt can provide a wide range of information on The Hague.

Public libraries (called "Openbare Bibliotheek") have some English language books. You can ask the procedure for obtaining a library card at each library. Information regarding procedures for borrowing books can be obtained at each library, as well as fee information. There are several libraries with only English language books. These libraries are as follows:

- 1) Amerikaanse Bibliotheek, Reguliersgracht 25, Amsterdam
- 2) The British Council, Keizersgracht 343, Amsterdam

- 3) The American Women's Club of The Hague Library, American Protestant Church (second floor), Esther de Boer van Rijklaan 20, The Hague
- 4) British Women's Club Library, Passage 61 (second floor), The Hague

Some tips on using the telephone book and other directories may be helpful. A telephone directory for each town and some of its neighboring towns is issued yearly. Information regarding phone rates, long distance calls, police and emergency numbers is listed in the first few pages. Names are listed alphabetically by last name under the city or suburb name. Names containing the "ij" letter combined are listed under "y" rather than "i" (for example, "Kijkduin" is listed as if it is spelled "Kykduin"). A name having two parts such as "van Dijk" or "de Jong" is listed under the capitalized letter. Once you have located the last name listing, and want to locate the phone number, it helps if you know the address (or at least the street name), because the listing is then alphabetically listed by street name. If you don't know the address or street name, knowing the man's occupation may help, as this is sometimes listed after his name and initials. Last names and initials are listed, not first names. Listings Americans might expect to find in the yellow pages are in the same section as individual names. A list of hotels, for example, can be found under "H", restaurants under "R", cafes under "C". The same system of alphabetic order is also used in listing street names on a map. A street such as "Esther de Boer van Rijklaan" is listed under "Boer – van Rijklaan, Esther de" in the "B" section; and "Burgermeester de Monchyplein" under "M".



A valuable guide for tourists and expats.

Several excellent books have been written about living in The Netherlands. They are available at many bookstores in The Netherlands, and would be helpful throughout your stay. They are as follows:

- 1) "Holland" by Cadogan Guides, 2000
- 2) "Here's Holland" by Sheila Gazaleh-Weevers, 2000
- 3) "Handling Holland – A Manual for International Women in The Netherlands" by Janet Inglis, 2002

WAY OF LIFE AND VALUES

EDUCATION

Education is highly valued in The Netherlands. People who have earned advanced degrees in certain fields such as engineering and medicine are highly respected. There are titles which are used in referring to people with these degrees, such as "Doctorandus" (abbreviated "Drs."), "Meester" ("Mr.") and "Ingenieur" ("Ir."). These titles are not used in addressing people with these degrees, but only in referring to them and in addressing correspondence.



When one has completed the training for a career field, one receives documentation that the training has been completed. This certificate is weighted heavily on a job application. Training standards for professions are generally high. Young people are expected to settle down and work hard once they have finished their training and have a job.

Schoolmates, particularly in universities, often become friends at school and remain friends for life.

FAMILY



Family life is very important to the Dutch people. They describe family members with two words, “gezin” (close relative, or nuclear family) and “familie” (more distant relatives). Family celebrations are highlights in a Dutch person’s year. Relatives attend a family member’s birthday celebration if at all possible. Dates of birthdays of relatives and good friends are noted on the birthday calendars that hang in the bathroom of a Dutch home. Letters are often addressed to the entire family rather than to one family member. Greetings are sent to the rest of the family at the end of a phone conversation or visit when some family member is not present.

The evening meal is a time for family conversation, and evenings are usually spent at home. Weekends are reserved for family activities. If the weather is nice, the family might go to a park, recreation area or amusement park, or simply for a walk. Retired people often live in their own apartments or in an old people’s home (a “hofje”, “bejaarden-centrum” or “bejaardenhuis”), but are

not left out of family activities. A grandmother, mother and grandchild in one family can often be seen shopping together, or all together on an outing.

The traditional attitude that women should stay home for the children is strong in The Netherlands, though it is changing. A housewife does cleaning, shopping, laundry and cooking primarily herself. There are not many families with household help, and few men, especially older men, are expected to help with household tasks. Dutch children sometimes come home for lunch, adding this responsibility to the housewife’s day. Sometimes the Dutch housewife handles the day-to-day financial affairs for the family. The husband often takes a sandwich to work for his lunch (carried in his briefcase), which is usually prepared fresh for him each morning by his wife. The evening meal is the large meal of the day, and often consists of soup, main meat course and vegetables. There may also be dessert.

By law, neither the husband nor wife can sell or rent the house, make excessive gifts to people, or sign a credit purchase agreement without the spouse’s permission.

THE HOME

The Dutch home is very special and important in a Dutch person’s life. A person’s life revolves in many respects around the home and family. The home is furnished nicely, and is cozy and comfortable. Plants and small objects are neatly arranged in the windows, which are always sparkling clean. A great deal of care is taken in selecting furnishings, and in keeping everything clean, dusted, polished, and in its proper place.

Furnishings are an investment, and are not replaced by new ones at a whim, or because the family is tired of them. It is expected that the furniture selected will be the furniture used for a lifetime. The family will save for the special purchase and buy when the cash is available. Credit purchases are not usual.

There is time for careful selection and planning because Dutch people do not move often. There are regulations regarding the size of a home where a particular family may



live, or the size of the family which may live in a particular apartment. The Dutch do not want to move away from their relatives, so tend to live in the same geographic area for most of their lives.

Sheer curtains are used rather than blinds or drapes. Anyone passing by can see into the homes, as opaque curtains are not drawn across the window. It has been said that this is done because people want others to see their furnishings, or because to have curtains drawn implies that something illicit is happening. It may be, too, that the Dutch are curious about the comings and goings in the neighborhood. You will see mirrors attached to some windows (called “spion-netjes”), and sometimes faces are reflected in them as the people in the home observe who and what is passing by.

Attention to detail and the Dutch person’s love for flowers are reflected in the rows of potted plants or window boxes filled brightly colored flowers which you see on window sills, balconies, or carefully arranged gardens in yards.

There are few freestanding houses in cities, but more rowhouses and apartments. Many of the newer homes in rowhouse plans are identical on the outside, but when you look carefully, it is easy to see that time and care have been taken to create an individual appearance for each home, within certain limits. Sheer curtains are used, but each unit has a different type. Window boxes are on almost every balcony or window, but some are filled with a variety of colors and types of flowers, whereas others are filled with one color and type. Plants, flowers, and treasured small objects are in each window, but some arrangements are very delicate, while others show a profusion of full, green plants.

A noticeable occurrence on a sunny day (rare in The Netherlands) which causes puzzled comments from Americans, is the bright canvas awning which comes down immediately to cover the windows. In a climate where the sun shines infrequently, one would think people would be glad to have the sun stream in, but the awnings come down to protect the furniture, carpets and parquet floors from the fading effects of the sun.



EPILOGUE

In terms of a work situation, some Americans were surprised to find that the work ethic expectations they had before arriving in The Netherlands were not met. It was not always possible for the American employee to describe the task he wanted accomplished to a local national employee and to find it completed without a lot of direct supervision. Work was not always completed quickly. Many local national employees take all of the annual leave and sick leave which is allowed during each year. There can be times when an office is short handed unexpectedly. It can be helpful to discuss annual leave plans each year to avoid staff shortages during July and August.

It surprised some Americans to find that unemployment benefits and benefits for illness were so generous. A person who is away from work because of illness, and under a doctor's care, cannot be fired or dismissed from work during the illness.

Some American officers felt uncomfortable knowing that most of the local national employees were earning more than the officers were earning. Some wondered if a feeling of superiority on the part of the local national employees) was developing or present. It can be somewhat awkward for an American to explain to a Dutch person that he doesn't eat out at restaurants or go to the disco nights very often because he cannot afford to do it.

Mention has been made in this paper of Dutch values. Not all of these value systems are being accepted or adopted by the Dutch young people. You may notice many changes during your stay in The Netherlands. This paper is meant to be a starting point for your exploration of Holland and your attempts to understand another culture.



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